

*Radical Periodicals In The United States*  
1890-1960

# **RADICAL PERIODICALS IN THE UNITED STATES, 1890-1960**

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# SOCIALIST APPEAL

*An Organ of Revolutionary Socialism*

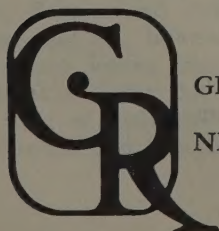
Volumes 1-3

*1934-1937*

*With an introduction by*

MAX SHACHTMAN

*Former Editor of Socialist Appeal*



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*Introduction*

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## Introduction

The *Socialist Appeal* became the organ of the American Trotskyists more by accident than by design.

In 1934, the Communist League of America, which was the name adopted by the first conference of American Trotskyists, approached the American Workers Party with the proposal for a merger. The A.W.P. had shortly before been constituted by A. J. Muste, in association with Francis Budenz, Arnold Johnson, E. R. McKinney, Ludwig Lore, J. B. Salutsky-Hardman, Sidney Hook, and James Burnham. It was small in membership—rather smaller than the C.L.A.—but much wider in influence, especially among militant trade unionists and active workers in organizations of the unemployed. Unlike its leadership, most of its ranks came to the A.W.P. as their first radical political organization. Their principal emphasis was laid upon the need to establish a native American grass-roots radical movement, independent of the traditional Communist and Socialist parties, which they regarded with varying degrees of disparagement. The Trotskyists, however, they—or most of them—viewed as doctrinaires and sectarians organically preoccupied with disputes in Russia and with other controversies remote from the A.W.P.'s basic concerns with American problems.

Yet the merger was successfully consummated at the end of 1934 under the new name of the Workers Party. A spectacular strike of the Minneapolis Teamsters, well conducted under Trotskyist leaders during that year, abated much of the apprehensions of the "Musteites" about the indifference and incompetence of the Trotskyists in matters of the American class struggle. The Trotskyists themselves went out of their way to reassure the others in the field of program by consenting to a joint party platform which was free from most of the traditional revolutionary phraseology that irritated the Musteites; and in the field of organization, by proposing ample equality to both sides in the united party's leadership, staff, and press.

The initial enthusiasm generated for the prospect of rapidly replacing the Communists and Socialists as the most effective party of radicalism, was, however, dissipated in a matter of months. The new party was speedily turning into a somewhat enlarged Trotskyist organization. Two of its leaders, Budenz and Johnson, went over to the Communist party. Three others, Lore, Salutsky-Hardman, and Hook, dropped away for other reasons. Soon the new infant was torn and harried by the kind of fierce factional fury that was endemic to the Trotskyist movement, here and abroad. It paralyzed the party, closed every avenue to recruitment, and bewildered the bulk of the Musteites who were in no way habituated to this form of internal life which their more hardened partners took in stride.

The main point in dispute was the question of the development in the Socialist party. It was growing again for the first time since the devastating Communist split in 1919; and its swelling ranks were shifting so far to the left that the older, right-wing leaders broke away from the party altogether. Radicals, in the unions and among the youth, whom the new Workers Party expected to win, looked instead to the Socialist Party as a renovated political vehicle. So too, with increasing interest and intensity, did the Trotskyist wing of the new party.

Prudently and moderately, at first, but with growing persistency, the Trotskyists sought to persuade the others that the road to building the revolutionary Socialist party in this country lay through affiliation with the Socialist Party and intimate co-operation in it with its heady but formless left wing. Trotskyist policy in those days permitted such an unusual turn. Trotsky himself had initiated the affiliation of the French Trotskyists with the French Socialist Party, and the same course was speedily followed by the Trotskyists—not without the customary split in their own ranks—in Belgium, Britain, and Italy. Trotsky's endorsement of the "French Turn" for the Americans did not, however, carry much weight with most of the Musteites, least of all with their leader, who seemed imbued with an all but inexplicable antagonism to the Socialist Party. But the Trotskyists prevailed against the opposition of an ultra-radical wing of their own and against Muste. Confidential negotiations were opened up by Cannon and Shachtman with Norman Thomas and Socialist left-wingers, who



were then espousing the idea of an "all-inclusive" party. In June of 1936, the wracked, 18-month old Workers Party announced its dissolution and its entry into the Socialist Party.

To be accepted, the Trotskyists had to pay a price. The Socialist leaders were not too eager to announce prominently that they now included Trotskyists in their ranks. So, the latter were obligated to join the party quietly and as individuals. Moreover, the fear of the Trotskyists as constituting a sharp, compact group of faction-fighters, who might cut through the Socialist Party like a hot knife through butter, prompted the S.P. negotiators to condition acceptance upon the suspension of the Trotskyists' weekly and monthly periodicals, and, in general, upon a promise of sedate inner-party behavior as good as, if not better, than their own. The demand was both stiff and unusual, but the Trotskyists were panting to join and they conceded without vehement objection but also without too much concern.

Shortly before the merger with the Musteites, one of the leading Chicago Trotskyists, Albert Goldman, had anticipated the move into the Socialist Party, for which he was bitterly denounced by the Trotskyist press. He quickly established warm relations with the local left wing and in particular with the leader of the Socialist Youth, one Ernest Erber. Together, they soon published a monthly, mimeographed, left-wing paper, the *Socialist Appeal*. And when the Trotskyists themselves decided to follow Goldman's example, relations between the two were promptly re-cemented. He happily agreed to put his paper at their disposal as a joint caucus organ in the likely event that the official Trotskyist press would have to be abandoned. That is how it happened.

The year and a half that the Trotskyists spent in the Socialist Party was not a happy one for the party, but it was, or it seemed to be, an outstanding success for the Trotskyists. The political and theoretical issues on which they advanced their views, are easily traceable in the present collection of the paper. The party itself was soon sliced to shreds by polemical duels and truels and quadruels, but the Trotskyists thrived. Indeed, their prospect for gaining the majority and the leadership was not remote.

But a conjunction ruled it out. On the one side, Trotsky, then in Mexico, began pressing his followers for a sharper factional line that would lead to a split and the re-constitution of an independent Trotskyist organization. This was as good as law for the Trotskyists here, even though a group of them was of a different mind. On the other side, the anti-Trotskyists in the Party were by then more than receptive to the idea of bidding their guests farewell, and not gently. The line between split and expulsion was of no material importance—each side was relieved to accommodate the other. At the turn of the year in 1938, the expelled Trotskyists and their unexpelled supporters constituted a new, independent Socialist Workers Party at a Chicago convention, with the *Socialist Appeal* as its weekly organ. The original Trotskyist entrants came out without losing a man, and brought with them not only scores of left-wing socialists but a good majority of the Young People's Socialist League, the youth group of the Socialist Party.

There remains only little to add. The S.P. was left in shambles, with a persistent train of other defections for years to come. The giddy victory of the Trotskyists was illusory and certainly ephemeral. Only two years later, after another—and inevitable—conflict and split in their own ranks, the S.W.P. could survey its membership and find, among other things, that there were less than a dozen former members of the A.W.P. left on its rolls, and there were perhaps a dozen former S.P. or Y.P.S.L. members left on its rolls. It never overcame these victories.

On February 4, 1941, the name *Socialist Appeal* was, for reasons that are not clear, dropped. The organ of the Socialist Workers Party thenceforth appeared under the name of the original American Trotskyist paper, the *Militant*.

—Max Shachtman  
New York, 1968